

Native Plants of the Plains and Foothills of Colorado:

Descriptions

Associations

Historic uses

Independent study
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This paper is the beginning of what could become a lifetime of research. It looks into two of the ecosystems of Colorado and consists of descriptions of plants, their associations, interrelationships with the animal life of the region and their uses historically by both settlers and Native Americans.

This list is by no means comprehensive, but it does include representative plants from each area. It is an attempt to understand the systems and history of this region in order to better design here.

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Native plants of the plains
and foothills of Colorado

Colorado is a state of connections, contrasts, diversity and surprisingly predictable patterns.

The Rocky Mountains are the dominating presence here and determine the wide range of physical conditions: from prairie to coniferous forest to semi-desert shrubland to alpine tundra.

Despite or because of this diversity, plants grow in predictable patterns depending on climate, topography and soils. Each zone has plants particular to it.

There is a commonality between the highest and lowest elevations in that there is a domination in these areas by herbs and grasses. Naturally occurring forests grow in the mountains only between 5600 to 11,000'. No trees occur in the high elevations because of drought, cold and wind and no trees are found in the lowest elevations due to drought, heat and wind.

There are rough boundaries for each climatic zone, but there is often an inter-fingering or mixing of ecosystems. These transitional areas or ecotones are characterized by a mixture of plant species from two or more communities.

Native plants reveal much about the characteristics of the site and are often good predictors of what animal species may be present. These plants may also give us clues to the lifestyles of Native Americans and early settlers in the area.

The Grasslands ecosystem

The plains grasslands are characterized by a climate which is dry, warm and sunny in the summer and cold in the winter. There is less than 20" of rainfall per year, most of which occurs in the spring and summer. The average annual temperature is 50 degrees with changes of up to 40 degrees between day and night. High wind speeds, their drying effects and high temperatures cause the summer drought.

Grassland species are well adapted to their climate. Most are perennials and most are drought tolerant or avoid drought by becoming dormant.

Prairie fires were once an important part of grassland ecosystems. Fires occurred during the seasonal drought and did not damage the dormant grasses. Trees and shrubs were the most susceptible to damage.

The grasslands are noted for their large numbers of plant eating animals or herbivores like:

Insects-ants and grasshoppers

Songbirds-Lark Bunting and Western Meadowlark

Mammals-Deer mice, Pocket Gopher and Prairie Dog

The Pronghorn and Mule Deer are the only large herbivores that are still common on the grasslands. Once millions of Bison dominated the plains. They were hunted to near extinction until, near the turn of the century less than 1000 remained. Numerous elk also wintered in the grasslands near the mountains; now they are rarely

seen below the foothills.

Where there are small animals there will always be larger predators like:

Mammals-Coyote, badger and Black-footed Ferret

Reptiles-Bullsnake and rattlesnake

Raptors-Golden Eagle and Prairie Falcon

Altered by grazing and agriculture, the grasslands have suffered large scale deterioration and widespread erosion. Intensive grazing and farming practices remove the protective native grass cover and expose the soils to wind and water.

Although the plains flora and fauna have changed over the years and are no longer a balanced assemblage of native species, plant and animal life is still diverse and abundant.

PRAIRIE PLANTS

Trees and Shrubs

Amorpha canescens (Leadplant)

One of the few shrubs found on the prairie, this member of the legume family incorporates nitrogen from the air into the soil. It has small, leaden-grey leaves and 6" spikes covered with small, purple flowers in the summer.

Leadplant is an excellent forage which is highly nutritive.

American Indians stripped and dried the leaves to make a tea-like drink and to smoke.

Chrysothamnus nauseosus (Rabbitbrush)

Rabbit brush is a deciduous shrub from 2 to 4 feet tall. The twigs are grey or light green and the leaves are narrow. Large rounded clusters of yellow flowerheads cover the plant in late summer.

In winter, Rabbitbrush is browsed by deer, elk and pronghorn.

Also called Rubber Rabbitbrush, it is a small commercial source of rubber extraction. American Indians made chewing gum from pulverized wood and bark. The plant was also used as a tea, cough syrup, yellow dye and for chest pains.

Ribes Aureum (Golden Currant)

This shrub has arching branches covered with showy yellow flowers in mid-May. Flowers are followed by red or black berries. Fall color is red.

Berries are edible by birds and humans.

Rosa Woodsii (Woods Rose)

Woods rose is found from the foothills to timberline and can reach heights of 8' but usually stays around 4-5'. Blossoms are pink, fragrant and about 4" across. The red hips are round, hard and appear throughout the winter.

Woods rose is a good browse for elk, deer and small

mammals. Birds feed on the hips.

Historically, Europeans have used rose hips as a source of vitamins A and C and as a flavoring in soups. American Indians used the entire plant: shoots as a potherb, leaves steeped for tea, petals eaten raw in salads or dried for perfume and the inner bark was smoked like tobacco.

Perennials and groundcovers

Anaphalis margaritacea (Common Pearly-everlasting)

Found in the dry open prairie and on rocky slopes, the leaves and flowers of pearly-everlasting are woolly white for most of the season.

Aquilegia canadensis (Canadian Columbine)

Two flowers in one, an inner yellow flower is surrounded by an elegantly spurred red outer flower.

Hummingbirds love it.

American Indians crushed the shiny black seeds into powder and mixed it with hot water to treat fever and headache.

Artemisia filifolia (Sand Sagebrush)

This native of eastern Colorado is commonly found in sandy soils. It can be a medium height shrub with soft, silvery-white, needle-fine, aromatic leaves.

Sagebrush is a good forage for deer and antelope.

In Mexico, a decoction of leaves was taken for intestinal worms and other stomach problems.

Asclepias tuberosa (Butterfly Weed)

Found on the plains, Butterfly Weed has brilliant, orange flowers which appear in the hottest part of the summer.

The flowers attract insects, especially butterflies.

The root was used by both Indians and pioneers to treat bronchial and pulmonary disorders.

Aster sericeus (Silky Aster)

This is a low growing plant with large purple flowers

which bloom in August and September.

Callirhoe involucrata (Purple Poppy Mallow)

This ground-hugging plant has a vine-like form with 1 1/2"-2" brilliant purple-red flowers from June to August.

Castilleja integra (Indian Paintbrush)

All summer, from May through August brilliant orange-red flowers appear on 4-12" stems.

Echinacea pallida (Pale Purple Coneflower)

Large purple flowers with drooping petals appear in early summer on 3-5' stalks.

Coneflower can be used for burns, snakebite and stings. It is soothing and unrivaled at relieving pain.

Filipendula rubra (Queen of the Prairie)

This plant is call Queen of the Prairie due to its showy, large, pink plumes which appear on 6' stalks in July.

Gentiana Andrewsii (Bottle Gentian)

One of the last to bloom in the fall, the bright, blue, bottle-like flowers never fully open.

Geum triflorum (Prairie Smoke)

Found on grasslands and open slopes, Prairie smoke is often associated with Gaillardia, Achillea and Thermopsis. Its name comes from from the blooms which appear in mid-spring which are followed by feathery, smoke-like silver and pink seedheads.

Helianthus occidentalis (Western Sunflower)

Bright yellow, star-like flowers on leafless stocks bloom throughout the later part of the summer.

Liatris aspera (Rough Blazingstar)

The flowerhead of this Blazingstar is composed of dozens

of bright pink filaments up and down a 3' stalk.

Goldfinches love the fluffy white seedheads.

Liatris ligulistylus (Rocky Mountain Blazingstar)

This Blazingstar is widely branched and has individual blooms rather than a spike. In July and August, crimson red buds burst open to reveal brilliant purple flowers.

Liatris pycnostachya (Prairie Blazingstar)

A frequent site on the prairie, this Blazingstar has a spike of tightly bunched magenta flowers which bloom from the top down.

Lobelia cardinalis (Red Lobelia)

This plant prefers moist to wet soil and is generally found in a shady spot near streams and rivers. Flaming red wands appear on 2-4' dark, red stems in August.

Hummingbirds love this plant.

Oenothera caespitosa (Tufted Evening Primrose)

This primrose has large white flowers at ground level which turn pink and wilt in less than one day.

The taproots were used as an herb for seasoning food and a decoction from them was used to treat coughs and other respiratory infections.

Opuntia fragilis (Brittle Prickly Pear Cactus)

This succulent has fragile stems which break off at the narrow point where they join the plant. It reproduces vegetatively- the broken piece simply roots in a new location.

Opuntia polyantha (Plains Prickly Pear Cactus)

Found in the grasslands, badlands, eroded areas and on south slopes, this succulent has delicate flowers. Red pulpy fruits follow.

Fruits are edible and tasty. Settlers made jams and jellies from them.

Penstemon digitalis (Smooth Penstemon)

Smooth Penstemon has clusters of pure white flowers in June on 2-3' stems.

Penstemon grandiflorus (Shell-leaf Penstemon)

This Penstemon has waxy, blue-green, shell-shaped foliage and produces pale purple to pink blossoms on 3' stems. Flowers appear in May and June.

Penstemon pinifolius (Pine-leaf Penstemon)

A groundcover with evergreen, pine-like leaves. This little penstemon has orange-red blossoms on 6-10" stems in June and July.

Penstemon secundiflorus (Sidebells Penstemon)

Sidebells Penstemon has deep green leaves and upright stalks with pink, lavender or deep blue blossoms which appear in May and June.

Ratibida columnifera (Upright Prairie Coneflower)

Found on prairies, plains, grasslands and along roadsides, this coneflower is 12-14" tall with 1-1 1/2" yellow to yellow and red-brown flowers. A column or cone of tiny tubular flowers in the center of the flowerhead is what gives this plant its name.

Coneflower is a fair to good forage for sheep and cattle.

The Cheyenne boiled the leaves and stems to make a yellow solution which was applied to draw out the poison of rattlesnake bites and for relief of poison ivy. Others gathered the heads during flowering to make a tea-like beverage.

Ratibida pinnata (Yellow Coneflower)

These large yellow flowers bloom in the heat of mid-summer on 4-5' stems. The flowers have drooping petal-like ray florets which circle the central cone.

Rudbeckia Hirta (Blackeyed Susan)

This plant has a 1-2", daisy-like flower with yellowish-orange florets around a dark brown disc center.

Solidago rigida (Stiff Goldenrod)

Goldenrod is found in thickets, low grasslands and open woods. Its flowers appear on erect, rigid stems from August through October. Flowers are radiant yellow and grow in dense crown-like clusters.

Mistakenly accused of causing allergies, the pollen from this plant is too heavy to be airborne.

Tradescantia chiensis (Spiderwort)

Clumps of grass-like leaves produce deep blue flowers in late spring and early summer. Flowers open first thing in the morning and blooms are closed tight by early afternoon.

Yucca glauca (Spanish Bayonet)

Found from the plains to the foothills its existence on earth is dependent on the yucca moth which pollinates the blossoms. Yucca is a plant of the lily family having stiff, sword-like leaves and white flowers in a single cluster.

On the plains the yucca provides shade and nesting for small mammals, birds and reptiles. The seeds provide a staple food for many small mammals.

Grasses

Andropogon gerardii (Big Bluestem or Turkeyfoot)

One of the most prevalent of the grasses, it is largely responsible for forming the prairie sod. Big Bluestem grows 3-8' tall and produces a large three-part seedhead which resembles a turkey's foot. The leaves turn reddish copper with the first frost.

Big Bluestem is relished by livestock.

Andropogon scoparium (Little Bluestem)

Found in prairies, open woods, fields and on dry hillsides, this perennial grass gets 2-3'tall. Topped by fluffy, silvery, white seed stalks, the leaves turn brilliant red in the fall.

Little Bluestem is a good forage when young and tender.

Bouteloua curtipendula (Sideoats Gramma Grass)

This midsize grass has tiny bright purple and orange flower parts. Later, small oat-like seeds are suspended on one side of an 18-36" stem.

A nutritious forage for livestock.

Bouteloua gracilis (Blue Gramma Grass)

Found on open plains and rocky slopes, Blue gramma grass has 3-6" leaves with 10-20" seed stalks. Seed-heads tend to look like human eyebrows.

Buchloe dactyloides

4-5' tall

Found on dry plains, Buffalo grass is a low-growing (1-2') perennial grass.

A good forage for all livestock throughout the year.

Panicum virgatum (Switchgrass)

This 8-5' tall grass has silvery, white seed stalks in the fall.

It is a good cover for a good wildlife cover.

Sorghastrum nutans (Indian Grass)

Indian grass is found in prairies, bottomlands, open woods and meadows. Its silky golden, brown seed-heads are prominent in late summer.

A good forage for cattle and horses throughout the summer.

Foothills Ecosystem

The foothills shrublands occur throughout the lower mountains of Colorado and often form a transitional belt between the plains grasslands and coniferous forests. This area is extensive in Colorado and has the greatest species diversity. It is highly variable in composition and appearance. It is characterized by dense to sparse deciduous shrubs which often occupy dry rocky sites. The shrubs provide food and shelter for the large number of animals in the area like:

Birds-Towhees, Buntings and Jays

Mammals-Chipmunks, rabbits, deer mice, bats, marmots, bob cats, mountain lions, mule deer and elk.

FOOTHILLS PLANTS

TREES & SHRUBS

Acer glabrum (Rocky Mountain Maple)

The grey-barked Rocky Mountain Maple is usually a large shrub, but may also form a small tree. Young twigs are smooth and dark red, winter buds are also red. The leaves are 3 to 5 lobed, sharply toothed and turn yellow to reddish orange in the fall. The fruits are in the shape of a double "key" and are winged for disperse by the wind.

The Rocky Mountain Maple is commonly browsed by deer.

Amelanchier alnifolia (Serviceberry)

This tall shrub grows to about 10 ft. In spring, Serviceberry blossoms into white apple-like flowers which are followed by edible blue berries and small oval leaves.

Serviceberry is an important deer and moose browse. Birds, squirrels, chipmunks and black bear relish the fruit and beaver and marmot eat the bark.

The fruits can be made into pies, jams and wine. American Indians used stems for arrow shafts and weaving.

Cercocarpus montanus (True Mountain Mahogany)

A loose growing shrub found in the foothills, on dry, rocky bluffs and on mountainsides. It has narrow leaves and inconspicuous flowers. Fruits have a silky curly tail.

Mountain Mahogany is an extremely valuable winter browse for deer. It is also a good browse for all types of livestock.

Because the wood is extremely hard, American Indians used it to make tools, war clubs and digging sticks. Concoctions from the roots were used for dye.

Chamaebatiaria millefolium (Fernbush)

This is a tall shrub which gets its name from its finely

cut, fern-like foliage. The leaves are very aromatic and almost evergreen. In spring, small white flower heads cover the plant.

Chrysothamnus nauseosus (Rabbitbrush)

A deciduous shrub from 2 to 4 feet tall. Twigs are grey or light green and leaves are narrow. Large rounded clusters of yellow flower-heads cover the plant in late summer.

In winter, Rabbitbrush is browsed by deer.

Rabbitbrush is also called Rubber Rabbitbrush and is a small commercial source of rubber extraction. American Indians made chewing gum from pulverized wood and bark. The plant was also used as a tea, cough syrup, yellow dye and for chest pains.

Fallugia paradoxa (Apache Plume)

A medium height shrub with grey stems. Its white raspberry-like flowers and clematis-like seedheads appear on the plant all summer.

Apache Plume is good winter forage for sheep and big game.

This plant is often used for erosion control. American Indians used bundles of the twigs as brooms and older stems as arrow shafts. The Hopi made a decoction from the leaves and used it as a hair growth stimulant.

Forestiera neo-mexicana (Mountain Privet)

Not a true privet, this is a tall shrub with pale grey or greenish bark. It is found massed along streams or scattered in the southwest canyon country. Clustered yellow flowers appear before the leaves. Small, numerous fruits follow and are blue-black and oblong.

Birds relish the berries.

Berries were also prized for drying by American Indians.

Jamesia americana (Cliff Jamesia or Waxflower)

A native of the eastern slope mountains, Jamesia grows mainly among rocks. Leaves are thick, green above and white with prominent veins underneath. Flowers bloom in clusters and are showy, waxy, white and orange-like. Fall color is a distinctive rose-pink and shredding reddish

bark is visible in winter.

Birds like the fruit.

Juniperus communis (Common Juniper)

This is a shrub which grows 1 to 3 feet tall and sometimes forms large clumps. The leaves are sharp-pointed and green with a white line on the upper surface. The juniper berries are blue when ripe.

Young plants are often nibbled by deer.

A juice made from fresh plant parts can be made which is rich in vitamins and mineral salts.

Philadelphus microphyllus (Littleleaf Mockorange)

This hardy, fast growing shrub is a native of the four corners. It is delicate with small, lemon-scented (sometimes considered pineapple-scented), white blossoms into late spring. Fall color is yellow-green and the reddish brown bark shreds into thin strips.

Potentilla Fruticosa (Potentilla, Shrubby Cinquefoil)

A low shrub with brown shredding bark and five-parted leaves. Small yellow flowers bloom on the plant all summer.

Potentilla is an important sheep and goat browse. It is browsed occasionally by white-tailed deer and extensively by mule deer.

This shrub is often used as erosion control and the leaves may be steeped as a tea substitute.

Prunus besseyi (Western Sand Cherry)

A shrub with narrow lance-like foliage and black tasty edible fruit.

Good for a wildlife cover.

Quercus Gambeli (Gambel or Scrub Oak)

Gambel oak reaches its northern limit here along the eastern side of the rockies. It has a short trunk, scaled bark, wonderful orange fall color and is extremely drought

tolerant.

Gambel oak is a good browse for deer, livestock and porcupines. Birds harvest the acorns.

The acorns may be eaten by humans after the tannin acid is removed. American Indians used the acorns to thicken soup and to make mush. They also obtained oil from the acorns to be used as a flavoring for foods.

Rhus trilobata (Three-leaf Sumac or Skunkbush Sumac)

This native shrub is found on exposed ridges, dry hillsides and in open woods. It has distinctive glossy three-leaved foliage and inconspicuous yellow flowers in May. Flowers are followed by clusters of fuzzy red berries. Three-leaf sumac spreads by suckering. It also has golden, orange or red fall color.

The fruits are eaten by birds and the leaves are browsed by goats.

The berries can be crushed to make a drink similar to lemonade. Fruits were also used as food and medicine, while slender shoots were used for basket weaving. Three-leaf sumac works well as an erosion control.

Ribes aureum (Golden Currant)

This shrub has arching branches with showy yellow flowers in mid-May. The fall color is red and the red or black berries are edible by birds and humans.

Ribes cereum (Wax Currant)

Wax currant is a shrub with greenish to white fragrant flowers in early summer and yellow fall color. Its small delicious, edible red berries are eaten by both birds and man.

American Indians ate the berries fresh or dried with raw mutton and deer fat.

Rosa woodsii (Woods Rose)

Found from foothills to timberline, this shrub can reach heights of 8 ft. but usually stays around 4-5 ft. Blossoms are pink and fragrant and about 4" across. The red hips are round, hard and appear throughout the winter.

Woods rose is a good browse for elk, deer and small mammals. Birds feed on the hips.

Historically, Europeans have used rose hips as a source of vitamins A and C and as a flavoring in soups. American Indians used the entire plant: shoots as a potherb, leaves steeped for tea, petals eaten raw in salads or dried for perfume and the inner bark was smoked like tobacco.

Rubus deliciosus (Boulder Raspberry)

A shrub of medium height from 2 to 5 feet tall. It has arching branches with light brown shredding bark. The leaves are rounded and bright green. The flowers are rose-like, white and 2 to 3 inches across. Fruits appear after flowering are raspberry-like and are eaten by birds.

Sheperdia argentea (Silver Buffaloberry)

A tall shrub with thorny branches and narrow silvery grey leaves similar to Russian olive. Male and female flowers are on different plants. The female shrub bears quarter-inch-long red or orange berries in late summer.

Berries make excellent jelly.

Perennials and groundcovers

Achillea millefolium (Western Yarrow)

This plant was said to have been named by Achilles. Millefolium means a thousand leaves and refers to the fact that the leaf is finely divided into numerous and narrow segments and looks like many small leaves. This segmentation gives the leaf a fern-like appearance. Flat-topped white flowers bloom on 6 to 24 inch stems from May to August. This plant is often found alongside *Artemisia frigida* in disturbed areas.

Sheep may graze yarrow during the growing season.

American Indians used this plant in a variety of ways. The Blackfoot made a decoction of the leaves for an eyewash. The Winnebago steeped whole plants and poured the liquid into aching ears. Leaves were used to relieve itching, toothaches and as both a mild laxative and as a cold remedy.

Anemone patens (Pasque Flower)

Found in the Rocky Mountains, foothills and prairies the pastel-blue pasque flower heralds the first days of spring. The crocus-like flowers appear in mid-April even before the surrounding vegetation turns green. It is often associated with yarrow and sage.

Antennaria parviflora (Mountain Pussytoes)

The most common of the antennarias, it forms a silvery mat on dry meadows and open wooded slopes. Mountain pussytoes is found from the foothills to timberline. Toe-like flowers appear on stems 2-8" tall and are papery white or pale pink at the tip.

Antennaria rosea (Pink Pussytoes)

Less common than parviflora, pink pussytoes is found in moist meadows and along streambeds from foothills to alpine. Bright pink flowers appear on 8-10" stems.

Aquilegia caerulea (Colorado Columbine)

Colorado's state flower, the columbine is found from foothills to over 12,000 ft.

Hummingbirds love the flowers.

American Indians crushed the shiny black seeds into powder and mixed it with hot water to treat fever and headache.

Aquilegia chrysantha (Golden Columbine)

Found from the foothills to montane regions, the golden columbine has large, long-spurred clear yellow flowers whose petals arch backward into knob-tipped spurs and alternate with five petal-like sepals.

Hummingbirds love the flowers.

Arctostaphylos uva ursi (Bearberry or Kinnikinnick)

Kinnikinnick is a bright evergreen groundcover with waxy pink flowers in spring and red berries in the fall

Black bear, grouse and wild turkey relish the fruit while the rest of the plant serves as a browse for black and

white-tailed deer and mountain sheep.

Kinnikinnick helps hold the soil in barren places. Its fruit is edible when cooked and was used by early settlers for treating urinary disorders. American Indians used the dried leaves as a tobacco substitute.

Artemisia cana (Silver Sagebrush)

This perennial has silvery, aromatic, three-parted leaves.

Sage is an important browse for livestock of all kinds.

A decoction was used by American Indians to stop coughing and an extract of the plant was taken to restore hair.

Artemisia Frigida (Fringed Sage)

This plant appears herbaceous but is woody at the base. It is drought tolerant with silvery, upright, ferny, fragrant foliage. Artemisia can often be found with *Achillea millefolium* in disturbed areas.

Artemisia is a good forage for sheep and goats and an important source of winter food for elk and deer.

American Indians call it "womansage" as it was used by the women in a variety of ways: to eliminate the greasy smell from dried meats and to make mats and fans. After it was chewed, it was used to bandage cuts. Artemisia was also used as menstrual pads, as toilet paper, and was steeped to make a bitter tea which was believed to be a remedy for typhoid fever.

Campanula rotundifolia (Bluebell or Harebell)

Bluebells are found in grasslands, thickets and open woods. The deep blue, nodding bell-shaped flowers appear on 6 to 12" stems from June through July.

Dodecatheon pulchellum (Southern Shootingstar)

A distinctive flower on leafless stalks of 6-12". The pink to purple flowers have five petals which flare back to reveal the conspicuous reddish tips of the stamen which, in turn, form a tight cone and point downward.

Epilobium angustifolium (Fireweed)

Found in disturbed areas, and moist places in open woods, this plant gets its name from its ability to rapidly colonize burned areas. It has cones of brilliant pink flowers which turn to fluffy seeds. The leaves turn bright red in the fall where large masses can make the hillside appear to be in flames.

Fireweed is a good forage for sheep, cattle, deer and elk.

Used as a potherb, the young shoots can be cooked like asparagus. The leaves can be used in salads or steeped for tea. The pith of the stem can be used to flavor and thicken soups.

Eriogonum umbellatum (Sulfur Flower)

Sulfur-yellow flowers appear on 6-8" stems which emerge from a groundcover of evergreen leaves.

Fragaria americana (Woodland Strawberry)

These wild strawberries are often found at the edge of the woods in the shade of open coniferous trees. They have three-toothed leaflets, white flowers with five petals and spread rapidly by runners.

Fruits are edible.

Gaillardia aristata (Blanket Flower)

Blanket flower is found in prairie grasslands, along roadsides and in open woods, often in the company of yarrow and sage. Yellow and orange flowers appear all season on 18" stems.

Helianthus Maximiliani (Maximillian Sunflower)

The name of this flower comes from Helios, meaning sun and anthos, meaning flower. It was named after the German prince Maximillian. This extremely tall sunflower has long narrow leaves that fold into a v-shape and large flowers in late summer.

The rootstock was used by the Indians to treat rheumatism, - boiled
and used as a poultice for coughs and kidney inflammation.

Maianthemum canadense (Creeping Mahonia)

The leaves of this groundcover are holly-shaped. Bright yellow, fragrant flowers appear in April and May followed

by edible fruits resembling purple grapes. The winter leaves are held and may turn red, purple and orange.

Monarda fistulosa (Bergamot or Beebalm)

Found in thickets, open woods and grasslands, monarda is a member of the mint family. It is a perennial that can grow to 5' in height with pink or lilac flowers which bloom in July and August.

Flowers attract bees.

American Indians boiled the flower to make a hair oil. The leaf can be infused as a tea to relieve nausea, flatulence and menstrual pain. Steam inhalation is used to treat sore throats and bronchial disorders.

√ Opuntia polyacantha (Plains Prickly Pear Cactus)

Found in grasslands, badlands, eroded areas and south slopes, this prickly succulent has delicate flowers followed by red pulpy fruits.

Fruits are edible and tasty. Settlers made jams and jellies from them.

Oxytropis lambertii (Lambert Loco Weed or Crazy Weed)

Deep purple flowers cover this plant in mid summer.

Locoweed is extremely toxic to grazing animals.

Penstemon grandiflorus (Shell-leaf Penstemon)

Blue-green, waxy, shell-shaped foliage surrounds 3' tall flowering stems with large pale purple to pink blossoms in May and June.

An extract of the stem tracts was used for treating fever and toothache.

Penstemon secundifloris (Sidebells Penstemon)

Deep green leaves surround upright stalks 8-18" tall with pink, lavender or deep blue blossoms in May and June.

Grasses

Bouteloua gracilis (Blue Gramma Grass)

Found on the open plains and on rocky slopes, blue gramma grass has 3-6" leaves with attractive seedheads supported on stalks of 10-20". As seeds drop, the seedhead bends to look like a human eyebrow.

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